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SUBJECT: Ambassador Launches New "Yes Youth Can" Initiative

REF: 09 NAIROBI 2485

¶1. Summary: As part of continuing intensive efforts to press for implementation of the reform agenda, on December 16 the Ambassador announced a new \$45 million USAID-funded initiative for youth in Kenya. Speaking at the Kenya Children's Parliament Foundation, the Ambassador launched the "Yes Youth Can" program to empower youth to advocate peacefully for implementation of reforms and to create new livelihood opportunities. This new initiative strongly complements on-going USG diplomacy and development efforts to reach out to and support youth and grassroots youth-led organizations throughout the country utilizing town hall meetings, small grants through USAID/OTI, and support for the November 2009 National Youth Summit (see reftel). The launch was extensively covered by the media. End summary.

¶2. The \$45 million "Yes Youth Can" program is part of the USG's coordinated response to the 2008 post-election violence and will focus on those geographic areas in Kenya that were most affected by the violence. The program strongly complements on-going USG diplomacy and development efforts to reach out to and support grassroots organizations to empower them to push peacefully for implementation of reforms, to promote national reconciliation, and to develop livelihood opportunities. Although they were not the primary organizers, youth numbered nearly 80 percent of the direct perpetrators and victims of the post-election violence.

¶3. The Ambassador called on the future leaders in the audience to advocate peacefully for key Agenda 4 reforms leading up to the 2012 elections, particularly those related to the constitution, the judiciary, and combating corruption. The reaction of the youth in the audience was overwhelmingly positive; in a follow-up question-and-answer session the participants asked the Ambassador specifically about how the USG could support youth to participate meaningfully in reform efforts.

¶3. A comprehensive assessment commissioned by USAID/Kenya of at-risk youth in Kenya, completed in November 2009, revealed that Kenyan youth have lost trust in the integrity of Kenya's political and social institutions and existing leaders, but that they stand ready to create a new cadre of leaders amongst themselves. Further, in an economy that does not create sufficient employment opportunities in the formal sector, entrepreneurship and micro-enterprise may provide the best opportunity for youth livelihoods. Empowering youth to participate in the political process responsibly and empowering them economically will contribute to future democratic stability. The initiative will support the development of effective national and local youth networks. The new initiative directly addresses to key issues: the fact that youth have not participated effectively in the political process and the fact that poverty enables politicians to readily

exploit youth.

¶4. A key component of the initiative will be a youth-managed fund to support grass-roots community development and empowerment projects implemented by youth and youth-serving organizations. By incorporating youth into the management of the fund, "Yes Youth Can" will promote transparency and accountability.

¶5. The Ambassador launched the initiative at the annual meeting of the Kenya Children's Parliament Foundation (KCPF). KCPF promotes youth participation in democracy and supports youth aged 12 to 18 years to develop leadership values. The KCPF models the Kenyan National Assembly and elects a Junior President, Junior Prime Minister, and Junior Cabinet members. At this year's event, the body debated the theme of national reconciliation.

¶6. The Ambassador used the occasion to urge youth to advocate peacefully for implementation of the reform agenda and to work for national reconciliation. The launch was covered extensively by the media.

RANNEBERGER